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Texas Agricultural Extension Service

The Texas A&M University System

Horticultural Update



Plant of the Month . . . February

Government Publications
Texas State Documents

MAR 29 1996

Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist
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Flowering Almond, *Prunus glandulosa*
Family: Rosaceae (Rose)
Zones: 4 - 9

Flowering almond is a welcome ornament in early spring, when the bare branches burst into bloom even before the leaves open. The plant's form is that of a multi-stemmed deciduous shrub which reaches a height of four feet, spreading to a width of about three feet. Single-flowered forms exist and may produce half-inch dark pink-red blooms, but double-flowered strains are most commonly found in Southern gardens. The cultivar 'Sinensis' has quarter-inch blossoms that are bright pink, profusely double, and tightly spaced in the stems. 'Alboplena' bears double flowers of the purest white. Native to China and North China, flowering almonds have long been cultivated in Japan.

Its early-flowering habit also makes this shrub a valuable source of cut flowers, for its branches can fill a vase most gracefully at a time of year when little else is in bloom. Indeed, in Europe flowering almond is commonly grown and forced for the floral trade.

For healthy, compact growth and the heaviest crop of flowers, prune the plants back severely during or just after bloom. Landscape uses range from single plantings as specimens to groupings as masses or even hedges. New plants are started from cuttings or from the suckers that spring up around the mature plants. Flowering almond was popular in Edwardian and Victorian gardens, and is easily grown and long-lived. A characteristic which makes it especially valuable for Southern gardeners is that this shrub requires only a very short period of chilling to induce flowering.

I grew up admiring flowering almond in a neighbor's garden in Houston and have enjoyed growing both the white and pink forms at our home in Washington County, Texas. Although easily grown and frequently found in old gardens and cemeteries, flowering almond is not as commonly available as it once was. You may wish to check the bargain counter of packaged deciduous shrubs at local discount stores, since the flowering almond often finds itself there. The white form is more difficult to locate than the pink. ♦

February 1996

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Texas Peach Pruning

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Peaches have been grown in Texas for over a hundred years. They have become established as a commercial crop at Fredericksburg, Tyler, Mexia, Pittsburg, Weatherford, and Montague because of deep well-drained soil, varieties, chilling, and good orchard managers. In addition to these factors, the performance of peach trees depends heavily on proper pruning annually.



Peach pruning is a hard labor-intensive cultural practice which is easy to avoid or compromise, but if trees are not pruned, the results are weak trees, overproduction, increased disease, and most importantly, short tree life.

Peaches bloom and bear fruit on second-year wood; therefore, the tree needs to make good growth each spring and summer to insure a crop for the next year. Each winter a large number of red 18- to 24-inch shoots need to be present as fruiting wood. If the trees are not pruned annually, the volume of fruiting wood reduces each year and the fruiting shoots move higher and higher, becoming out of reach. Alternate-year pruning results in excessive growth the year following heavy pruning, so annual moderate pruning is essential for the long-term control of tree vigor and fruiting wood.

Timing Peach Pruning

Late-spring frost is the single greatest factor in Texas peach production, and the grower does not want to prune too early. The peach tree will bloom soon after pruning when chilling is satisfied and warm weather follows. Growers with only a few trees can wait until "pink bud" to prune. Large growers should not prune earlier than necessary. Pruning in Texas should be at least in February just prior to bloom in March.

Objectives of Peach Pruning

The main goal is to remove old grey-colored slow-growing shoots which are not fruitful and leave one-year-old red 18- to 24-inch bearing shoots. Removing 40 percent of the tree annually stimulates new growth each spring. The second objective is to lower the fruiting zone to a height which can

be hand-harvested from the ground. A third objective of peach pruning is to open the center of the tree; this allows air to circulate, thus reducing disease pressure, and lets sunlight into the tree to accelerate fruit color. Additional objectives of pruning are to remove diseased or dead shoots, rootstock suckers, and water shoots.

Four Steps On How To Prune A Mature Peach Tree

Step one: Remove all hanger shoots, rootstock suckers, and water shoots in the lower three feet of the tree. This stripping of lower growth clears a path for herbicide applications and allows air circulation.

Step two: Remove all shoots above seven feet in height other than red 18- to 24-inch fruiting shoots. Cuts need to be at selected points where the scaffold and sub-scaffold limbs extend upward at a 45 to 50 degree angle. Cuts which leave limbs sideways at a 90 degree angle should be avoided.

Step three: Remove *all* shoots which grow toward the inside of the tree.

Step four: Remove all old grey wood in the three- to seven-foot fruit production zone.

Additional Hints on Pruning Peaches

Always remove bull shoots in the middle of the trees any time they develop. Summer pruning immediately after harvest can help reduce bull shoots in the top of the tree.

Wear gloves, long sleeves, eye protection, and a cap which covers the ears to prevent injury.

Pruning paint is not needed.

Peach pruning should remove 40 percent of the tree each winter. This reduces the number of fruit on the tree and stimulates strong growth of fruiting wood each year.

The key to long peach tree life in Texas is deep well-drained sandy soil, peach-tree borer and scale insect control, weed control, and correct pruning. Fruiting will depend on escaping spring frosts. ♦

January 10, 1996

Some Plant Death is Preventable

Ted Fisher, County Extension Agent (Horticulture)
Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Travis County

Have you ever had a plant die, even one that you had carefully planted and pampered? Of course you have. Plants die all the time; they die on everyone, from the professional horticulturist to the novice gardener. Regardless of the care we may give some plants, they just don't seem able to survive. And it may have been no cause of your own.

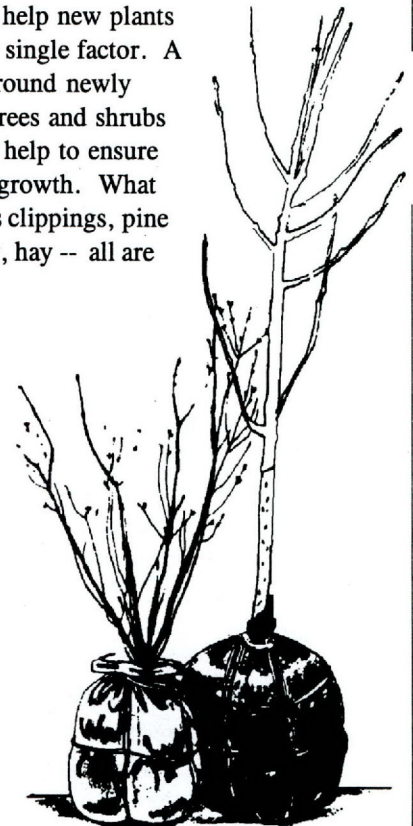
Plant death can occur due to many factors. Some causes, such as freeze damage, may be readily identified, while others are more difficult to discover. Death by natural causes is not uncommon. Just expect a certain amount of this when plants are young, and again when they have reached the end of their normal life span. When you plant a large number of plants, expect a few to never establish. For example, when planting two dozen of the same species of landscape shrubs, it is not uncommon at all to have one or two die in the first few weeks after planting. Don't worry about it; it wasn't your fault. There was probably nothing you could have done to prevent it.

Similarly, when any plant gets old, its growth rate slows and it tends to become much more susceptible to insect and disease problems. These are problems that are difficult to avoid, as nature takes its toll. There are, however, other problems and situations that are the avoidable kind. These can be categorized as follows:

- **Poorly adapted plants.** Don't waste your time, labor, and money on plants not suited to your area. There are many others from which to select, including a multitude of outstanding native trees and shrubs.
- **Transplanting at the wrong time.** While we can buy and plant balled-and-burlapped and container-grown nursery stock year-round, we should only dig up and transplant established plants in December, January, or February when the plants are dormant. When digging and transplanting plants, it is essential that you prune a fourth to one-half of the canopy on transplanted materials to bring the top into balance with what is left of the damaged root system.
- **Excessive fill over feeder roots.** Adding more than six inches of heavy clay soil over the feeder roots of trees will often suffocate and kill established trees in two or

three years. This often happens during new home construction where the repeated movement of heavy equipment under and around trees on the construction site can prove to be fatal due to soil compaction and resulting root damage.

- **Lack of deep watering.** All plants, but especially newly planted trees and shrubs, need deep, thorough soakings. This is especially critical during the summer months. The best way to water woody plants is to lay your hose under the drip line, turn it on slowly, and soak the soil thoroughly. Simply watering the lawn or sprinkling the flower beds is not enough for your woody plants in hot weather.
- **Too much fertilizer.** Over-fertilization by overzealous gardeners can deal a fatal blow to landscape plants. Use fertilizer with care and caution, especially during hot weather, and always read and follow the manufacturer's directions on the bag or box.
- **Failure to mulch.** Research indicates mulching does more to help new plants establish than any other single factor. A heavy mulch applied around newly planted or established trees and shrubs will work wonders and help to ensure survival and improved growth. What to use? Pine bark, grass clippings, pine needles, compost, straw, hay -- all are excellent. ♦



Pruning and Cutting Roses

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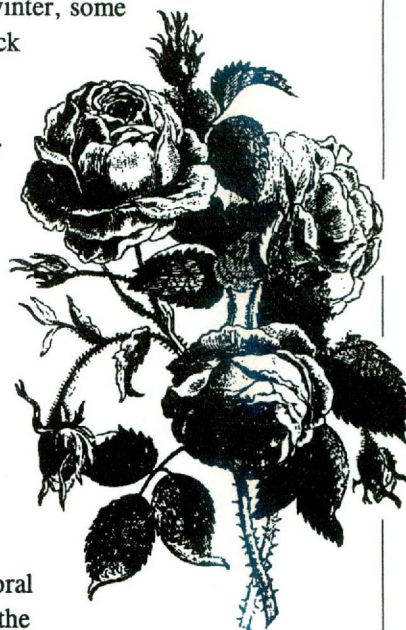
Pruning

Late February and early March are the best times to prune roses for most of Texas. Hybrid Teas, Floribundas, and Grandifloras are usually pruned heavily at those times (down to 18 to 24 inches from the ground). Miniatures are trimmed down to a few inches above the ground also in late winter. Pruning weak growth and canes that cross as well as general thinning can best be accomplished in the late February and early March period. Weak or dead canes should be removed or shortened to healthy tissue any time during the year.

Some rose growers prefer a less drastic approach to annual pruning. Shaping the plants and cutting back the vigorous canes one-fourth to one-third their length can result in more attractive plants, especially for old shrub-type roses. Care should be taken to prune most climbers and one-time

bloomers after they flower in the spring so as not to reduce their seasonal show.

It should be kept in mind that most old garden roses are attractive landscape plants with a pleasing natural form. This form should still be apparent after pruning. In addition to pruning in late winter, some rosarians cut their plants back moderately in mid August. This practice, along with a light application of fertilizer and a thorough watering, if needed, can promote an excellent fall floral display with many varieties.



Cutting Flowers

Improper cutting of flowers can injure the plant and decrease its vigor. It is best to cut few, if any, flowers during the first blooming season. By removing only the flowers and no stem, the plants will develop into larger bushes by fall, at which time some flowers may be cut. Early removal of foliage and long stems reduces the food manufacturing capacity of the plant and subsequent flower yield.

When cutting is done, use sharp tools and allow at least two leaves to remain between the cut and the main stem. Use sharp shears or a knife to cut just above the topmost leaf. Roses that are cut just before the petals begin to unfold will open normally and remain in good condition longer. Late afternoon is the best time of the day to cut roses.

Plunge the stems immediately into warm water (about 100 degrees F.) and recut the stems an inch or so from the base. Add flower preservative according to label instructions if

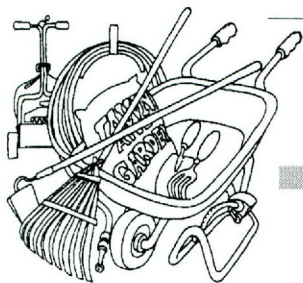
maximum life is desired.

Research has shown that floral preservatives often double the useful life of roses and many other flowers.

Floral preservatives can be purchased from retail florists or from floral concessions in supermarkets. A mixture of one part 7-Up drink (not the diet type) and one part water has been shown to be an effective preservative. It is important for the mixture to stand long enough for most of the air bubbles to dissipate.

Equally as important as the use of preservatives is a good pure water source. Rain water or distilled water should be used when arranging flowers, since sodium and other materials in most tap water can shorten their life.

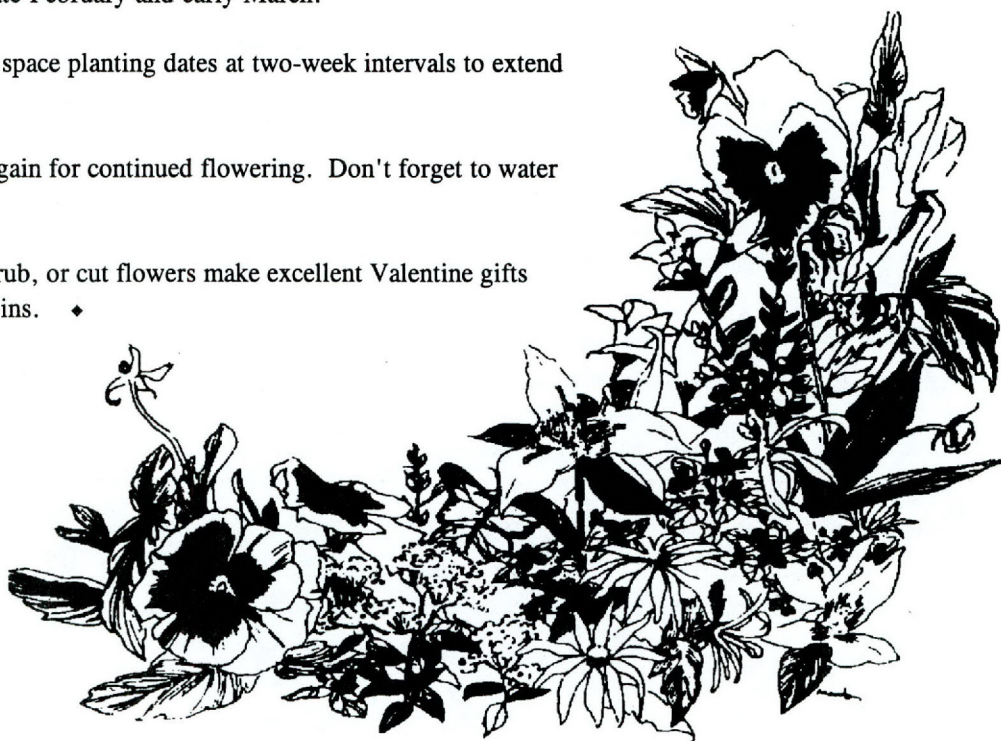
Place the flowers in a cool, draft-free area until ready to use. High temperatures and direct sunlight quickly take their toll on cut flowers. ♦



Garden Checklist for February

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- ✓ Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly, the first year.
- ✓ When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially with bare-rooted plants. The medium to small sized (4 to 6 feet) usually become established faster and will become effective in the landscape more quickly than the large sizes.
- ✓ Complete the bare-root planting of woody landscape plants this month. Container and ball-and-burlapped plants are in good supply and can be set out most any time. Winter and early spring planting provides an opportunity for good establishment before hot weather comes.
- ✓ Prune roses during February except in the Panhandle and far North Texas, where roses are pruned in March or April. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove dead, dying, and weak canes. Leave four to eight healthy canes and remove approximately one-half of the top growth along the height of the plant.
- ✓ Now is an excellent time to select and plant container-grown roses to fill in bare spots in your rose garden.
- ✓ Wait until after they finish flowering before pruning spring-flowering shrubs such as quince, azalea, and forsythia.
- ✓ When pruning shrubs, follow these steps: (1) prune out any dead or damaged branches first; (2) thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level, removing the oldest canes only; (3) shape the rest of the plant but do not cut everything back to the same height.
- ✓ Plant dahlia tubers in late February and early March.
- ✓ Plant gladiolus corms; space planting dates at two-week intervals to extend flowering season.
- ✓ Fertilize pansies once again for continued flowering. Don't forget to water when needed.
- ✓ A potted plant, tree, shrub, or cut flowers make excellent Valentine gifts for loved ones and shut-ins. ♦





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Crop Reports

U. S. PECAN CROP. The U.S.D.A. has revised the total U. S. pecan crop estimate to 239 million pounds, down from the initial forecast of 248 million. Even so, this estimate is still some 40 million pounds over the 1994 crop.

TEXAS CITRUS CROP DOWN. The Texas citrus crop estimate was revised by the U.S.D.A. in early December, and the new forecast reflects what many in the industry have been saying about lower production. The grapefruit volume was reduced from an initial 200,000 tons to 176,000 tons -- 10,000 tons lower than last year's production.

The early orange estimate was reduced from an initial 43,000 tons to 38,250 tons, some 2,125 tons below last season's crop. The Valencia estimate was reduced from 9,000 tons to 6,375 tons -- still considerably above last year's 4,462-ton Valencia crop. Because the Valencia crop estimate is still rather optimistic, the total Texas orange crop is currently about the same as last year.

Julian W. Sauls, Professor and Extension Horticulturist

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Horticultural Update is published by Extension Horticulture, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System, College Station, TX

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EDITOR FEBRUARY 1996

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